

AUTISM SPECTRUM NEWS

YOUR TRUSTED SOURCE OF SCIENCE-BASED AUTISM EDUCATION,
INFORMATION, ADVOCACY, AND COMMUNITY RESOURCES

SUMMER 2018

VOL. 11 NO. 1

Supporting Students on the Autism Spectrum

Creating Individualized, Data-Based, and Effective IEPs

By Sharon Onda, MEd, BCBA,
Kylee Formento, MA, BCBA,
Erin Way, MS, BCBA,
and Vanessa Laurent, PhD, BCBA-D
Melmark

All children, including those with autism and other developmental disabilities, are entitled to a free and appropriate education (FAPE), as outlined originally in Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as well as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (Individuals with Disabilities Act, 2004). This includes educational services which are designed to meet the individual needs of students with disabilities, including evaluation and subsequent re-evaluation for the need and level of special education and related services, access to general education curriculum, and non-disabled children to the greatest extent possible, and the right to due process. In a recent court case (Andrew F. vs Douglas County School District), the



Supreme Court ruled that Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) must give students more than *de minimis* (i.e., minimal) edu-

cational benefit. This represented a departure from prior rulings that emphasized benefit, and permitted minimal benefit.

In order for IEP teams to provide students with disabilities educational programming that maximizes success and independence, a comprehensive IEP process must be established. This includes creating appropriate IEP goals and objectives based on direct and indirect assessments (Gould, 2011), choosing functional goals and targets to optimize academic achievement and increase skills for post-21 preparedness (Wehman & Kregel, 2012), continuous progress monitoring for rate of acquisition, and progress toward annual IEP goals, and data-based decision making in regards to modifications of program materials and/or instruction (Wehmeyer et al., 2002; Thoma, Ligon, & Witing, 2004).

Assessments

Once functional skill areas to be addressed in the IEP are identified by the team, a determination must be made regarding which specific skills will be targeted

see IEPs on page 14

Accommodations for Students in the Higher Education Environment

By Samantha Feinman, MEd, TSHH
and Casey Schmalacker
New Frontiers in Learning

The transition from high school to college may be challenging for all students, but especially for those diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) and related learning differences. With so many changes in academic, social/emotional, and independent living demands, it is essential that students transitioning to college be proactive with regards to setting up the appropriate accommodations and supports to help encourage academic success. Each institution has its own system of accommodations; therefore, it is imperative that students know in advance not only their eligibility for accommodations, but also how to access and utilize them.

Accommodations adapt an academic program to allow students to access curriculum and demonstrate knowledge (Freedman, 2010). Accommodations are not intended to change the expectation of what a

student is to learn; rather, accommodations make adjustments in how the student engages with classroom material and/or allow for flexibility in how students demonstrate that learning has occurred. Eligibility in the higher education environment fall under The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 which requires institutions to provide access to accommodations to students that disclose a disability and can provide documentation demonstrating a qualifying need (American Psychological Association, 2018).

Barriers to Receiving Accommodations in Higher Education

Although higher education institutions are required to make reasonable accommodations accessible to students with supporting documentation on the college campus, there appears to be a discrepancy between students being eligible for accommodations and students actually utilizing them. This is a concern because, according to research conducted by Kim and Lee, utilizing accommodations have a significant

impact on students' overall GPA (2015). It is important to identify which barriers are preventing students eligible to utilize accommodations from actually following through with using them in the postsecondary environment.

Marshak, et al. (2010) identified five major barrier categories that prevented students with disabilities from utilizing accommodations in the college environment. The first category, *issues with identity*, includes students' desire to be self-sufficient and remove the stigma of having a disability from their identity in college. The second barrier, *avoidance of negative social consequences*, includes students' fear of being singled out as receiving special treatment and, thus, being resented by peers. The third category, *insufficient knowledge base about the process*, includes students questioning the fairness of being able to utilize accommodations, not knowing what services were available and where to receive them, and a lack of ability to describe their disability and advocate for supports that have been historically beneficial. The fourth category, *the perceived overall qual-*

ity of the services, includes initial negative experiences when trying to set up accommodations or negative experiences when trying to actually utilize them. The final category, *negative experiences with faculty*, identifies students' experiences that faculty did not believe the accommodations were needed, nor did they demonstrate a follow through in assisting in the implementation of the accommodations.

Overcoming the Barriers Through Self-Advocacy

By identifying the barriers associated with the avoidance of using accommodations in the postsecondary environment, we can take a more proactive approach to clearing up any confusion and misconceptions about the process. Encouraging students to advocate for supports that will assist in a smooth transition to college may lead to greater success and retention. An important skillset to develop prior to the transition is self-advocacy.

see Accommodations on page 17

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David H. Minot, BA, Publisher

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The Use of Self-Monitoring Interventions to Support Inclusion for Adolescents Diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder

By Stephanie A.C. Kuhn, PhD, LP, BCBA-D
Assistant Professor
Western Connecticut State University

There are numerous benefits to inclusion in school settings for students diagnosed with autism (Harrower and Dunlap, 2001). However, there are also many challenges related to inclusion for many of those students and for the educators and the support staff in those settings. Problematic behavior displayed by students diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is one such challenge.

Behavioral challenges that are present in the lower grades may become more of a disruption in the later middle school years and into high school. In addition, problem behavior that was not observed prior to adolescence may emerge or worsen. These behaviors can lead to alternative placements. There are many factors to consider when students are placed outside of the general education classroom setting.

The general education classroom is considered the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) in most situations and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires that students be placed in the LRE (IDEA; 2004). For some students, the level of academic instruction in the general



Stephanie A.C. Kuhn, PhD, LP, BCBA-D

education classroom may be appropriate, yet problem behavior may occur at a level that exceeds what can be tolerated in a general education classroom. In many cases, behavioral interventions can be effective in managing the problem behavior in the general education classroom for these students (Koegel, Matos-Freedon, Lang, & Koegel, 2012; Shapiro, Durnan, Post, & Levinson, 2002).

Evidence-based practice for assessment and treatment of problem behavior includes

functional behavioral assessment (FBA) and function-based behavioral interventions (i.e., interventions designed based on the function, or reinforcer, maintaining the challenging behavior). These procedures have been demonstrated to be effective in school settings for individuals with ASD who display challenging behavior.

FBA procedures are designed to identify environmental events that both occasion and maintain challenging behavior. Function-based interventions can be designed based once the function of the behavior has been identified. These interventions often include an extinction component, which prescribes that the reinforcer responsible for maintaining the challenging behavior is no longer delivered following the problem behavior. For example, if the behavior is found to be maintained by escape, extinction would involve no longer allowing escape following the challenging behavior and maintaining the demand or task issued.

Extinction procedures have been demonstrated to be very effective. However, these procedures can be very difficult to implement in situations where the implementers do not have control over the delivery of the reinforcers. One situation where it can be difficult to implement extinction procedures is in inclusive education settings. If for example, an individual screams or throws materials in order to gain access to

attention or escape tasks extinction would involve no longer providing attention or escape from tasks following screaming or throwing materials. In an inclusive setting, attention may be delivered inadvertently by peers. In addition, escape extinction may not be possible given the disruption to the other students when screaming or throwing occurs (i.e., making it difficult or impossible to maintain the task demand when these target behaviors occur). If the target behaviors continue to result in reinforcement it is likely that the behaviors will continue to occur. In these situations, strategies that do not rely on the reinforcer being withheld should be considered.

In addition, it is especially important to teach adolescents with ASD strategies that don't rely on external agents such as teaching assistants, teachers, or parents to implement the treatment such that they can more independently reach their goals. An intervention that has been demonstrated effective in improving student academic and behavioral outcomes along with maintaining and generalizing these gains is self-monitoring or self-management. (Harrower & Dunlap, 2001). With these procedures, students with ASD are involved in setting goals for themselves and are subsequently taught to identify appropriate and

see *Self-Monitoring on page 16*

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ADVOCACY FOR AUTISM



Autism Saved My Life

By Becca Lory, CAS, BCCS
Advocate/Speaker/Writer/Consultant

For 36 of my 40 years, I was disabled. I was cut off from the world but for the tiny bubble that was my bedroom. Barely able to care for myself, angry, scared and lonely, I felt hopeless and broken. Suicidal thoughts were a daily reminder of my inadequacies and failures. I was certain there had been a mistake. I was clearly not meant for this existence. That is until autism entered my world and saved my life.

I'm certain you must be wondering how a deeply depressed and suicidal, disabled person could have been saved by an autism diagnosis. I'm sure it sounds even more strange to say I was disabled *until* my autism diagnosis. But that is the truth. I was living a paralyzed life of misery, mistakes, inevitable failures and disappointments. Forget succeeding, I was desperately trying to just survive. And just when I was certain it was time to give up, autism turned on the light, handed me a pair of glasses, and said, "Here. Can you see now?"



Becca Lory, CAS, BCCS

And see I could. With my autism diagnosis came a new, giant vocabulary to describe my experiences. Meltdown, sensory overload, anxiety, social blindness, theory of mind; the list was endless. There were books, endless books. Workbooks, textbooks, memoirs, and guides filled Amazon

boxes deposited almost daily on my doorstep. Each box packed with valuable information. With every page, my confidence grew and so did my world. Armed with facts, I was unstoppable. Suddenly, I could change things. Brimming with new data, I was finding I could make informed decisions for the first time in my life. One educated decision after another and I was gaining momentum. Each time I recognized an opportunity for change and took it, was a small success to be celebrated.

Autism colored my world with vibrant possibility which before had been a swirling vortex of chaos and confusion. The world was making sense to me through the lens of autism and I was finally ready to live life on my terms. Layers of society's constraints and demands piled high over the years were slowly peeling away and underneath was me. Who was this new person? What made her happy? What excited her? What did she like? What was she good at? I was getting to know myself in a way I had not been able to before and I liked this version of me. I liked

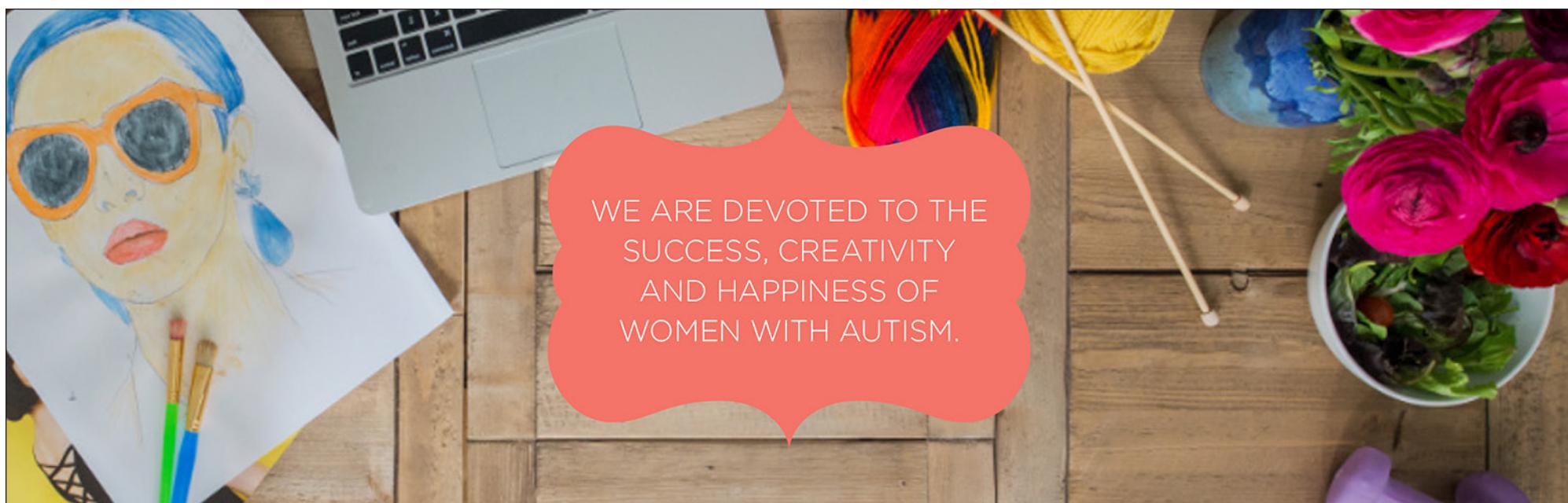
this version of life. I liked this version of MY life.

I powered forward. Learning along the way. Making changes. Having successes. Having failures. All the while getting to know this new, unrecognizable me. A me

Autism colored my world with vibrant possibility which before had been a swirling vortex of chaos and confusion. The world was making sense to me through the lens of autism and I was finally ready to live life on my terms.

that was motivated, empowered, and confident replaced the shell of a human that I had once been. I tried every strategy and support I could find. Keeping the ones that worked, modifying those that didn't, and tossing the utter disasters. I was rebuilding a life that I could enjoy. What a concept! I could make choices and decisions to not only live, but to live better. It started with sunglasses to limit light sensitivity. Then

see *My Life* on [page 18](#)



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My Professor Can't Teach!

What College Students Can Do to Accommodate Themselves

By Ryan Therriault, MA,
and Cristina da Silva
The College Internship Program (CIP)

The stage is set. You successfully started college, ready to learn. Your teacher passes out the syllabus which states that you will have four tests and one paper. As the weeks go by, you realize there are assignments that were not mentioned in the syllabus. In addition, you are unsure what will be on the test or when the test will be. Your teacher suggests that you study the chapter, but what does that mean? You read some of the chapter, but after a half an hour you're starting to doze off and you can't remember what you just read. In class you try to follow the professor's lecture, but you can't seem to remember everything said. Even with the PowerPoint, you find yourself spacing out and missing all the information. You try to take notes but it is impossible to hear it, process it, reword it and write it back down. You try your best and maybe pass the class but ultimately come to the conclusion that your professor can't teach!

As academic coordinators at The College Internship Program, we have witnessed the challenges college students experience every day. We coach the students on social



Ryan Therriault, MA

and executive functions in the academic environment and we teach them academic skills. We've observed that once they are in college, they are expected to know how to extract information and how to infer missing information, based on the well-intending professor's instructions. These skills are challenging for all students, but even more so for those with ASD (Anderson et al., 2017).



Cristina da Silva

Ideally, a college professor would create a class structure adapted to multiple learning styles by using a variety of teaching techniques, such as drill and practice, study guide worksheets, lecture and interactive class discussion. They would allow multiple opportunities to assess what was learned such as activities, group work, essays, tests and projects. The teacher would provide a supplemental timeline

complete with due dates and objectives. Their ideal professor would take a percentage off for late work, drop a test, substitute the final for the lowest test and provide a copy of notes and PowerPoints. While many do create the utopian college environment, the reality is that college professors are not required to provide this degree of structure. The expectation is that the students adapt themselves to the academic environment. Colleges attempt to assist the students with adapting by providing services such as the accommodations for students with disabilities, learning labs, peer support and on-campus therapy. They help the students to manage their time, track their assignments, apply study skills, find assistive technology, talk to their instructors, and use coping strategies. Parents and support groups can provide the nudge necessary to encourage the students to access these supports. Ultimately, it is the student's responsibility to create their best learning environment without inconveniencing others.

Building a Structure by
Managing Environment

Regardless of a student's exceptionalities, there is a standard structure to be followed

see *College Students* on page 20



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Supporting Students with Autism Through Evidence-Based Employment Intervention

By **Dianne Zager, PhD**
Co-Director and Dean of Education
Shrub Oak International School

Unemployment rates for people with disabilities currently are hovering around 80%, with even higher rates for individuals with autism spectrum disorder (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017). Over the past several decades, employment outcomes for students with autism have remained consistently poor (Skaff, Kemp, McGovern, & Fantacone, 2016). It is clear that special educators need to do a better job preparing students for the transition to employment. The good news is that transition programs have emerged in schools across the US; the not-so-good news is that these programs rarely lead to jobs upon graduation (Agran, Hughes, Thoma, Scott, 2016).

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA, 2014) emphasizes the need to support students as they transition to employment. Individualized career pathways, including career awareness, service learning, job shadowing, internships, and even paid employment (Kittleman, Bromley, & Mazotti, 2016) have been suggested as possible means to improve outcomes. The WIOA points to competitive integrated employment as the desired employment



Dianne Zager, PhD

outcome for individuals with disabilities. If we are to meet the requirements of this Act, schools need to do a far better job preparing students for meaningful careers.

Whether students with autism choose to pursue higher education or wish to begin a job upon graduation, they should be afforded experiences to explore varied career options (Cease-Cook, Fowler, & Test, 2015). Just as math and English are considered indispensable components

of a good education program, teachers need to be trained to provide effective evidence-based instruction in transition and career development.

The Employment Intervention Model

The first step in improving employment outcomes for students with autism is to develop a meaningful career development curriculum that is grounded in evidence-based principles and practices. The Employment Intervention (EI) curriculum developed at Shrub Oak International School serves as an example of multi-faceted transition programming that is research-informed and data-driven. The EI curriculum is built upon Universal Design for Transition (UDT) principles and the Self-Determined Learning Model of Instruction (SDLMI). Universal Design for Transition instruction adapts learning activities rather than trying to change the individual. The UDT framework, developed by Thoma (2009) offers strength-based instruction that is designed to meet individual learning preferences, interests, and characteristics. UDT is a research-based approach that has been used with success to teach job skills and work-related behaviors to support students with autism in inclusive transition programs (Zager, Alpern, Mckeon, & Mulvey, 2013).

An example of UDT might involve a student who has a career aspiration to work in a bakery. The student will need skills in measuring liquids, powders, and/or solids (math and science), use of timers to monitor baking time (math), reading skills to follow recipes (literacy), and social communication competence to interact with co-workers and customers. These relevant academic and social skills, which are based on the student's stated interests, can be taught concomitantly in the classroom, around the school, and at worksites in the local community. The EI model is ideally suited for use with individuals with autism because its flexibility and wide range of presentation styles can accommodate diverse information processing styles to increase opportunities for engagement in learning activities, as well as to enhance fluency and generalization of skills. In short, EI is a student-centered, strength-based, data-driven model with collaboration among educators, employers, and family at its core (Emmons & Zager, 2018).

UDT by itself would constitute a major improvement in transition education. Combined with the Self-Determined Learning Instructional Model, the likelihood of successful student outcomes is exponentially increased (Wehmeyer, Palmer, Lee,

see Evidence-Based on page 21



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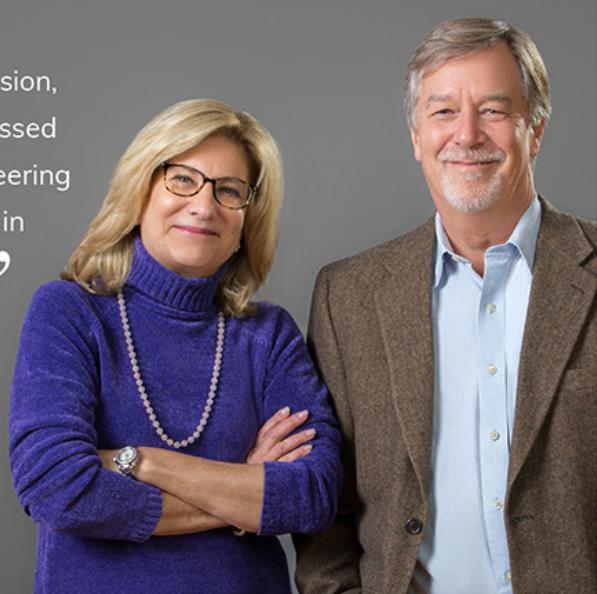
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Dianne Zager, Ph.D.
and Gil Tippy, Psy.D.



ADVOCACY FOR AUTISM



Supporting Students on the Autism Spectrum: Many Things Need to Change

By Karl Wittig, P.E.
Advisory Board Chair
Aspies For Social Success (AFSS)

It has been a long time since I was a student. In fact, it would be many years before most people would even have heard the word autism, and decades before I was finally diagnosed on the spectrum. As such, I never received any supports or accommodations. Fortunately, I managed to succeed academically to the point where I was able to have a professional career. What most people don't realize, however, is that were it not for an incredible amount of luck, my story may well have ended quite differently. As such, I am writing about supports and accommodations for ASD students mainly from the standpoint of things that would have benefited me had they been available all those years ago. I also consider many stories that I have heard over the years of my involvement with the ASD community.

Although many on the autism spectrum will certainly need intensive interventions and full-time support services, which can



Karl Wittig, PE

be very expensive, the lives of many more ASD students can be greatly improved simply by increasing awareness of the challenges they face on the part of teachers,

administrators, and other education professionals, and by providing accommodations to these students that mitigate their challenges. This can be done at virtually no cost to either families or taxpayers simply by changing some long-standing attitudes, beliefs, ideas, and practices.

One such attitude is the belief that things like social skills and daily living skills do not need to be taught in schools. This notion is based on the erroneous idea that everybody is able to "pick up" these skills instinctively and as such do not require their explicit instruction. I recently attended a presentation on research which revealed that, even though IQ and daily living skills are positively correlated in typical populations, the latter are nearly independent of the former in autistics. More than 10 years ago, at a high-functioning autism conference, I learned that such instruction was only provided to students with intellectual disabilities (as determined by IQ). Over the years, I have heard many family members and education professionals describe their exasperation with a young person on the

spectrum who has considerable difficulty with very basic things even as they have extraordinary talents in other areas; this applies not only to "twice-exceptional" students of high academic ability, but to all

Some of the greatest gains in helping to support students on the autism spectrum can be made by changing traditional and conventional practices, attitudes, and ways of thinking.

those who have any of the "splinter skills" that are common among autistics (such as extensive, detailed knowledge about an area of specialized interest). They cannot understand why these otherwise-gifted individuals are so challenged by things that the vast majority of the population is able to learn with at most a modest effort. Educators need to understand the nature of autism and the challenges that it presents to students living with it, and policies that deprive these students of adequate instruction

see Change on page 22

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2018 Daniel Jordan Fiddle Foundation “Leader in Adult Autism Award” Presented to Neal Katz at Autism Society of America National Conference

By Staff Writer
Autism Spectrum News

The third annual *Daniel Jordan Fiddle Foundation Leader in Adult Autism Award* was presented to 24-year-old ‘disability emissary’ Neal Katz during a Keynote Luncheon at the [Autism Society of America’s](#) 50th Annual National Conference, held this year in Washington, D.C., July 10-12. Foundation president Linda Walder presented the Award to Neal.

The [Daniel Jordan Fiddle Foundation](#) (DJFF) was founded in 2002, and was the nation’s first and only autism organization focused exclusively on adults at that time. Since then, the Foundation has been a beacon of hope for millions of autistic adults through its groundbreaking programs, endowments, and partnerships with the nation’s leading colleges and universities, researchers, autism organizations, and governmental advocacy groups.

Foundation President Linda Walder established the organization’s namesake award in 2016, together with the Autism Society of America (ASA), to recognize an inspirational person, service provider, or employer in the field of adult autism in order to encourage all autistic adults and their families to dream big and roll up their



Linda Walder with Neal Katz, recipient of DJFF 2018 Leader in Adult Autism Award, his aide Ryan Berman and his mother Elaine Hall

sleeves to create options for employment, housing, and leisure activities that open doors to full and productive lives.

From her Charleston, S.C., office Walder said: “The Daniel Jordan Fiddle Foundation Leader in Adult Autism Award furthers

our mission to inspire and support individuals diagnosed with autism, their families, and the community at large in their efforts toward full recognition and inclusiveness for adults living with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD).”

The Daniel Jordan Fiddle Foundation Leader in Adult Autism Award is an organic collaboration between the Foundation and the Autism Society of America, as both organizations share an abiding respect for the lifelong rights of all autistic individuals. The ASA’s national conference is world-renowned as the premier autism event for individuals, professionals, and families. The Autism Society of America, founded in 1965, is a leading national autism advocacy, resource, and family support organization whose mission is to increase public awareness about the day-to-day issues faced by people living with ASD.

According to Scott Badesch, President/CEO of the Autism Society of America, “We are so grateful for our partnership with The Daniel Jordan Fiddle Foundation, including the sponsorship of their ‘Leader in Adult Autism Award,’ which recognizes inspiring adult individuals on the spectrum, as well as forward-thinking businesses and organizations that employ and celebrate autistic adults.”

2018 honoree Neal Katz, 24, lives in Los Angeles with his mom and stepdad. He is nonverbal, and communicates via assistive technology on his iPad. He loves hanging out with his friends at the beach, listening to music, shopping, and helping with chores

see *Adult Award* on [page 19](#)

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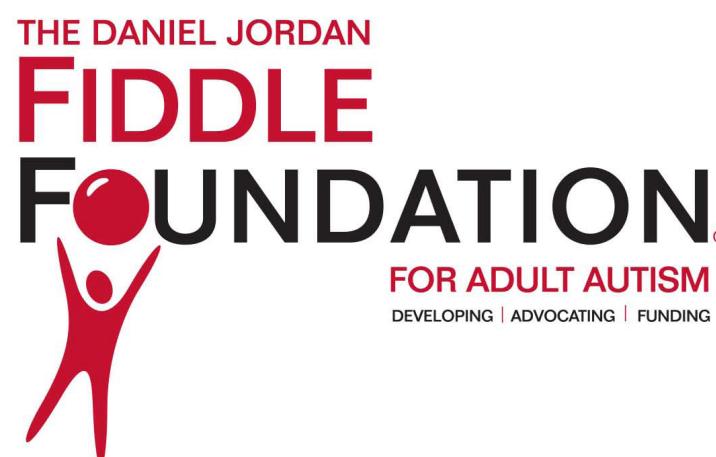
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Peer-Mediated Intervention for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders

By Teala Groski, MEd
Special Education Teacher
and Autism Consultant

“Those around a person with autism must change first in order for change to occur in one with autism” (Schlieder, Maldonado & Baltes, 2014). Autism seems to be a buzzword in and out of medical, educational, and political conversations. Autism is more than just a buzzword. It is a formal diagnosis with a broad spectrum of meaning. Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a social disorder that affects each individual differently. When you have met one person with autism, you have simply met one person with autism. When thinking about autism and all that it entails, we must consider how we can best create opportunities to interact and teach effectively to those who are affected. There are several interventions that provide insight to the world of autism and give us a sense of connection when working with those on the autism spectrum. By considering various interventions, we can often find something that works and is effective for the individual we are working with. Peer-mediated interventions are an effective intervention when working with individuals on the autism spectrum. These interventions utilize general education peers who are readily available, provide students on the



Teala Groski, MEd

spectrum the opportunity for inclusion in the general education classroom, and have proven positive short-term and long-term outcomes for all individuals involved in the intervention. Although these interventions are still being researched and developed, the progressive outcomes are highly motivational.

When working with students with disabilities, diverse challenges arise between general education and special education setting transitions. As educators, we must

seek ways to streamline these transitions in an effort to create ease for our students and those who interact with them. Transitions can be extremely difficult for students with autism spectrum disorder. Students often benefit from warnings prior to transitions, visual schedules, and verbal prompting throughout the day. Staffing issues can make these needs very difficult to attend to at times, but teachers still strive to meet the needs of all their students. There are multitudes of great techniques that help students receiving special education services to be included in their classrooms for more extensive parts of their day. Several children receive support from paraprofessionals or educational assistants. Although adults as interventionists can provide appropriate support for students, researchers (Henry, 2017, p. 40) noted that “adults as interventionists can have a negative impact on the overall success of interventions. Adults provide a discriminative stimulus for all students to interact with each other.” When thinking about this factor, perhaps there is a more effective interventionist available within the school setting.

Peer-mediated interventions are an Evidence Based Practice (EBP) for promoting social communication in younger children, primarily showing positive results in children ages birth to eight years old (Cole, 2015). The overall idea of peer-mediated interventions is that students on the autism spectrum spend the majority of their

time during the school day in their general education classroom with their general education peers. The purpose of peer-mediated interventions is to help teach peers to promote academic, social, and communication outcomes with disabilities by providing support in skill acquisition and an increase in participation in academic and social events (Bell & Carter, 2013). There are various names for peer-mediated interventions, some which are coined by school groups, parent groups, or community groups. A particular peer-mediated intervention that is implemented and studied by Walden University is termed, “Circle of Friends.” This peer-mediated intervention is based on a social constructivist approach and is defined as an educational approach that facilitates the inclusion of children with disabilities in a school community with the ability to proactively support students with individual needs (Schlieder, Maldonado & Baltes, 2014). Regardless of what the peer-mediated intervention is titled, all of these interventions share a goal of using direct instruction partnered with peer-mediation to show improvement in children’s communication with one another (Henry, 2017).

My interest in special education grew when I worked in a residential school in Duluth, Minnesota. I was exposed to varying different student situations and

see *Peer-Mediated on page 21*



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Should All Nonverbal Young Children with Autism Immediately Have AAC Taught to Them?

By Kristie Lofland, MS, CCC-A
Indiana Resource Center for Autism
Indiana University - Bloomington

Lack of speech is often the most obvious symptom of an autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and greatest cause of concern for parents of young children. For many families of children with ASD, having their child learn to talk is their primary goal. Children with ASD who learn to use spoken language as a primary means of communication have better outcomes than those who do not (Howlin, 2005). Children with ASD who are verbal have more opportunities for social interactions with family and peers, as well as a greater chance of participation in mainstream settings in school and community. Fifteen years ago, experts estimated that approximately 40% of children with ASD did not acquire functional spoken language and these children had the poorest long-term outcomes. However, many experts now estimate that the current proportion of children with ASD who do not speak is between 20-30% (Rogers, 2003).

The question then is how to facilitate the emergence of meaningful spoken language so that the largest possible number of children with ASD will acquire speech at the



earliest point in development. Developing speech is only one aspect of communication as there are other important communication goals as well.

Several factors have precluded young children with ASD from developing verbal speech. Unfortunately, research has not yet yielded a best instructional method for enhancing early communication or

calculated the time it takes to successfully implement such intervention. Research has revealed a variety of approaches that demonstrate efficacy for both increasing communication and eliciting first words from non-verbal young children. However, no guidelines are given to help determine which methods are more effective, for which children, and at what point in

development. So, we know it is possible to teach language but we do not know the best way to do it for all children with ASD. Again, it depends on the individual child. Whatever approach is used, effective language teaching involves ongoing individual interactions with a child using carefully planned and sequenced strategies and clear reinforcement practices in natural environments. Collecting ongoing data and using such data for decision-making is crucial. The bottom line is skill development and skill generalization.

Most young children with ASD only receive a few hours of speech-language therapy a week and therefore, they are not receiving rigorous enough intervention to make the most rapid gains possible. However, communication is not just the responsibility of the SLP, but the responsibility of every person who works with that child since communication occurs in every setting. Therefore, it is necessary that a collaborative process be in place for all team members to know how to implement all communication interventions so the interventions can be delivered throughout the child's day and environments.

A second component of successful implementation includes training parents or other caregivers to provide opportunities

see *Nonverbal* on page 16



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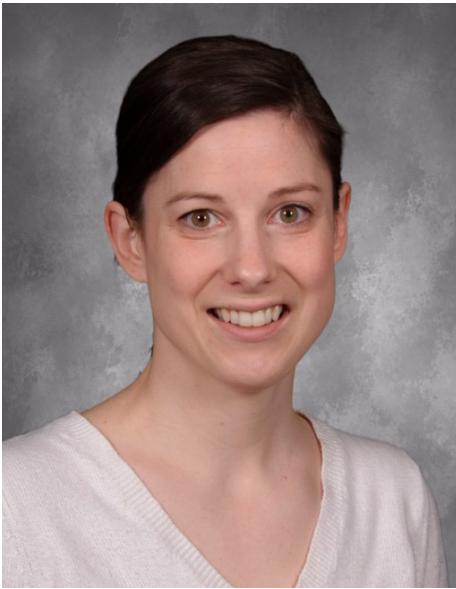
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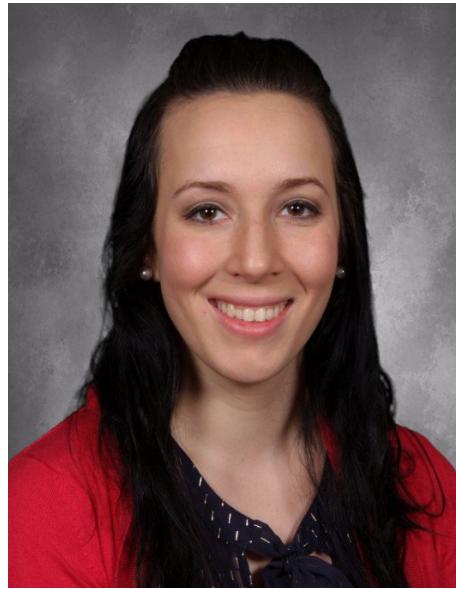
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Vanessa Laurent, PhD, BCBA-D

IEPs from page 1

under each goal for that year. IEP teams must be strategic in selecting target skills to teach each year because the skill deficits associated with ASD can affect all areas of an individual's development. It may be necessary to prioritize goals, so that the list is able to be accomplished. Comprehensive assessment is required to determine the student's current skill repertoire as well as their areas of strength and need related to the functional objectives identified by the team. According to Gould et al. (2011), failure to thoroughly assess a student's needs prior to program planning could result in a number of issues including an unbalanced curriculum and

a program that is not sufficiently individualized to the student's needs to result in meaningful progress. Each of these issues could significantly impact a student's ability to make meaningful progress towards his or her goals. For example, selecting target skills without first assessing a student's baseline performance could mean that the team spends the entire IEP year attempting to teach a skill for which the student does not possess the necessary prerequisites. Doing so results in lost instructional time and potential frustration for the student. Notari & Drinkwater (1991) found that goals written based on the results of assessment were more functional, measurable, and had greater generality than those written from a computer-generated list of tar-

gets. Similarly, Pretti-Frontczak & Bricker (2000) found that teachers who were provided with training in administration and interpretation of assessments wrote higher quality IEP goals than those they had written prior to receiving the training.

A wide array of assessment tools is available to IEP teams, including both direct (e.g., Verbal Behavior Milestones Assessment and Placement Program) and indirect (e.g., Vineland Adaptive Behavior Scales) assessments. Direct assessments require that the student demonstrate the target skill at the time of assessment, whereas indirect assessments ask respondents to rate how often they have seen a student demonstrate a particular skill over some time period (e.g., in the last 6 months). Regardless of whether direct or indirect assessment methods are used, Gould et al. (2011) recommend that teams utilize assessment methods that are comprehensive and consider the function of the behavior. Finally, they recommend that there be a direct link from assessment items to specific targets within the student's programming and that assessments be used in tracking student progress over time through repeated administration.

Functional Targets/Goals

When considering IEP goals, educators and families should reflect on the functionality of each goal. An IEP goal or objective can be considered functional if it is useful to the child in negotiating his or her daily environments (Pretti-Frontczak 2000). Boavida et al. (2014) describe high-quality goals as meeting certain criteria, including being appropriate for the context and reflecting real-life situations, and addressing meaningful skills necessary for the child's participation in family, classroom and community routines. Furthermore, it is important to identify appropriate instructional objectives that promote independence and to be of life long value (Bender, 1998). If limited time or ability presents itself, it is important to teach skills that will be needed to navigate the environment through adulthood. For instance, learning to read directions to complete a task at a job site would be more functional than learning to read words from a story book. Wehman and Kregel (2012) suggest looking at each subject and considering skills needed in several domains as an adult such as: employment/education, home and family, leisure, community, and physical health. In other words, in the area of math, what skills would one need to learn to navigate a job.

It is important to determine IEP goals based on the individual and his or her needs. The IEP team, including the individual and his or her family, should consider the child's most likely scenario of adult life and work towards skills that will be of use in that scenario. The family is the best team member(s) to determine what is functional for their child. IEP goals and objectives should be referenced to valued life outcomes as described by the individual or family, taking into account health, having friends, having creative outlets, making choices, age appropriate control and having access to preferred places and activities (Giangreco et al. 1994). The IEP team's aim should be for the student's life to be better as a result of participating in the educational experience expressed in the IEP (Giangreco et al. 1994).

Modifications to Instructions

The use of data-based instructional modifications are essential during the process of developing and running instructional programming (Horner et al., 2005). Butler and Stevens (1997) defined modification and accommodations as providing support to students by adjusting assessment or instructional materials so that the student can respond appropriately. Thoma, Ligon, and Witing (2004) defined instructional modifications as the support provided to students with disabilities in order to access the curriculum.

The IEP is an important document that drives decision making concerning instructional modifications (Shriner & DeStefano, 2003). In order to determine which type of modifications to implement, teachers must first determine the presence or absence of specific skills and abilities by conducting assessments or referencing the data gathered from previous assessments (Greer & Ross, 2008). Upon completion of assessment and data analysis, the information collected is used to confirm which type of modifications to instruction should be implemented. Thoma, Ligon and Witing (2004) highlighted three types of instructional modifications; adaptations, augmentation, and alterations. Curriculum adaptations refers to any modifications and adjustments made towards the presentation of the curriculum in order to modify the learner's engagement with the curriculum (Weh-meyer et al., 2002). Augmentation

see IEPs on page 18

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AUTISM SPECTRUM NEWS DESK

Inherited Variations in Noncoding Sections of DNA Associated with Autism

Study sheds light on paternally-inherited genetic risk factors

By The National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH)

A new study has identified an association between paternally-inherited rare structural variants in noncoding segments of genes and the development of autism spectrum disorder (ASD). The study, funded in part by the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) and published in Science, adds to a growing body of research describing genetic contributors to ASD.

ASD is a developmental disorder that affects communication and behavior. Researchers have identified a number of genes associated with the development of ASD. Many studies have focused on examining the inheritance of, or mutations in, portions of genes that code for the creation of proteins or other molecular products. But these new findings suggest that rare, inherited structural differences in the noncoding portions of genes also contribute to ASD.

“Gene sequences represent only two



percent of the genome.” said Jonathan Sebat, Ph.D., of University of California San Diego School of Medicine (UCSD) and the Beyster Center for Genomics of Psychiatric Diseases. “The next challenge is to identify ASD risk variants affecting genetic regulatory elements. Examining

these elements will help us understand the genetic components that contribute to the development of ASD, and symptoms seen in people with ASD.”

The researchers examined the contribution of structural variants in noncoding regions of DNA called cis-regulatory ele-

ments (CRE-SVs) to ASD. These elements control the expression of genes. The researchers sequenced the genomes of 829 families, which included 880 individuals with ASD, 630 individuals without ASD, and their parents. Participants with genetic mutations that are already well-established risk factors for ASD were not included in this study. In this way, the researchers were able to focus on identifying noncoding inherited genetic variants that might be associated with ASD.

The researchers identified structural variations in coding and noncoding portions of DNA, and they examined the inheritance of these genetic elements from parents to their offspring. Their research revealed deletions in protein-coding areas of genes were transmitted more often from parents to offspring with autism than from parents to offspring without autism. They also found that CRE-SVs were transmitted more often from fathers to offspring with autism than from fathers to offspring

see Inherited on page 17



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Self-Monitoring from page 4

inappropriate behaviors, to record those behaviors, to evaluate the data, and to deliver rewards to his/herself when certain criteria are met (Harrower & Dunlap, 2001). The effectiveness of self-management strategies has been demonstrated in full-inclusion classrooms (Callahan & Rademacher, 1999; Frea & Hughes, 1997.) In addition, there is support for self-management programs increasing independent functioning while reducing reliance on a one-to-one aide and maintaining effectiveness over long periods of time in a full-inclusion classroom setting (Koegel, Harrower, & Koegel, 1999).

Recent studies examining the use of technology-based self-monitoring interventions have produced promising results (Clemons, Mason, & Garrison-Kane, 2015; Crutchfield et al, 2015). These applications (i.e., “apps” on mobile devices) have been demonstrated to both increase task completion and decrease challenging behavior (Clemons, Mason & Garrison-Kane, 2015) and have been demonstrated as effective in high school settings with students with disabilities (Wills & Mason, 2014). In addition, although both pencil and paper and technology based self-monitoring applications have been demonstrated as effective in increasing independence in task completion, there is some evidence that students preferred the technology-based option (Bouck et al, 2014).

There are several commercially available self-monitoring applications (i.e., “apps”). One example, I-Connect, uses alarms, calendars, checklists and prompts as intervention components. Another,

Score It, has components for both students and teachers to rate behavior using a rating scale. There appear to be various opportunities to design function-based behavioral interventions to decrease challenging behavior of individuals with ASD in inclusive environments using both traditional and the newer technology based self-management interventions. For example, students can rate if an antecedent for challenging behavior was present, if they responded with challenging or appropriate behavior, and apply consequences based on the response that occurred (i.e., access reinforcement such as a break or withhold reinforcement). This combination of technology, self-management procedures, and effective function-based treatment procedures is promising. In addition, the preliminary evidence suggests that the student prefers the technology. Furthermore, the use of the program on a personal device may be less stigmatizing than other interventions and the technology-based self-monitoring interventions may allow the student greater independence.

Overall, the use of function-based technology-based self-management interventions may result in greater benefits to the student and the classroom as a whole. As these applications continue to be developed, researched, and become more widely used, they will provide teachers and support professionals new and innovative ways to not only include students in the general education classroom, but to enable them to be more independent and successful.

Stephanie A. Contrucci Kuhn, PhD, LP, BCBA-D, is an Assistant Professor in the

Education and Educational Psychology Program at Western Connecticut State University and provides behavioral clinical and consultation services through her private practice, Kuhn Behavioral Services, LLC. For more information, please contact Dr. Kuhn at skuhn@wcsu.edu or Stephanie@kuhnbehavioralservices.com.

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Nonverbal from page 13

for the child to engage in repeated practice of the use of new communicative forms and functions in everyday activities. According to the National Research Council (2001), parent training is a necessary practice for intervention with young children with autism. Parents can learn all the major interventions at a high level of fidelity, deliver them at home, and improve their children’s language abilities. Interventions that embed instruction in the natural family routines and child-care practices are especially effective.

Some children with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) may benefit from the use of alternative/augmentative communication, known as AAC. AAC includes any type of communication that is not speech in order to replace or supplement talking. While AAC can sound mysterious, it really boils down to using visual (see) or tactile (touch) means to help communicate. The rapid growth of computerized communicative aides has greatly increased the potential for nonverbal student with ASD. Augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) intervention methods can be used temporarily or permanently (ASHA, 1991). According to von Tetzchner and Martinsen (1992), individuals who might benefit from AAC fall into three groups: (a) the expressive language group, in which individuals understand language but have difficulty expressing themselves: (b) the supportive language groups, comprised of two sub-groups that include children who extemporarily use AAC in order to facili-

tate understanding of spoken language as well to express themselves or children who speak but have difficulty being understood; and (c) the alternative language group, in which AAC is a permanent means of receptive and expressive communication.

While AAC does play a crucial role as a primary communication system for some children with ASD, it does not necessarily assist in developing useful, communicative speech. Currently, there is no empirical evidence that the use of AAC will accelerate the development of spoken language. A recent research review concluded that although there was evidence of improvement in children with phonological and expressive problems, the effect on those with more severe communication difficulties was limited. There is no evidence that any one program is superior to others in terms of producing a higher rate of spontaneous and generative communication or with greater generalization (Howlin, 2008). There was some evidence that an augmentative system may encourage a previously nonverbal child to speak. However, remember, that time spent on AAC training is not time spent on learning to use and understand speech and it takes considerable time to learn an AAC system.

Consider that by 18 months, babies have heard 4,380 hours of spoken language and we don’t expect them to be fluent speakers. Yet, if AAC learners only see symbols modeled for communication twice weekly for 20-30 minutes, it will take 84 YEARS for them to have the same exposure to aided language as an 18 month old has to spoken language. (Jane Korsten- QIAT Listerv 2011).

Who are the best candidates for immediate consideration for AAC?

1. **Nonverbal children who do not progress into vocal imitation even after they have learned to imitate body movements, and who may have sight word vocabulary and other nonverbal cognitive skills.** These would be young children who cannot learn to imitate speech phonemes and have a true underlying speech dyspraxia. They desperately need AAC to develop symbolic communication. Some will develop verbal speech as they use signs, PECS, etc., or a combination of strategies.
2. **Preschoolers whose nonverbal performance skills are well below 12-month level.** They will not have the necessary cognitive skills to support language development. This will be a small group of children. They will need to use gestural and simple, low tech AAC.

Because functional spoken language predicts better outcomes for preschoolers with autism, and because the large majority of young children with autism apparently can master speech, should teaching children to understand and use speech be a main priority of every early intervention program for children with an autism spectrum disorder? Yes!

“The gap is immense between the language treatments most children with autism receive and what connotes the state of the science in language intervention for children with autism.” – Sally J. Rogers

Kristie Lofland, MS, CCC-A, is an Educational Consultant for the Indiana Resource Center for Autism at the Indiana Institute on Disability and Community at Indiana University, Indiana’s Center for Excellence on Disabilities. For more information, visit www.iidc.indiana.edu/pages/irca.

This article is reprinted with permission. You may view the original article, published on March 14th, 2018, at www.iidc.indiana.edu/pages/should-all-nonverbal-young-children-with-autism-immediately-have-aac-taught-to-them.

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Accommodations from page 1

Self-advocacy is one's ability to speak on behalf of themselves, and requires one to understand who they are as a learner. Students should go to college with a clear understanding of the purpose of accommodations, how specific accommodations relate to their learning style, and where to go to discuss options. Such conversations should begin, at minimum, when transition services begin, and can be role played during CSE meetings, meetings with tutors, coaches, therapists, and others in the students' lives that are supporting them through the transition to college. Many students have a difficult time discussing their learning challenges, and practice in having those conversations prior to the accommodations intake meeting is essential to easing anxiety in the process.

What is the Process for Obtaining and Utilizing Accommodations

Once students are comfortable with sharing their strengths and needs as a learner, it is important for them to begin to understand how to advocate for accommodations on the campus. Students need to understand that obtaining approval for accommodations is a different process from actually utilizing them. Typically, students have to schedule an intake meeting with the office on campus responsible for providing accommodations. If possible, this meeting should occur prior to the transition to the campus so the student has the accommodations solidified prior to classes beginning. In order to practice self-advocacy, students should call or email the office depending on the school's specific process, and schedule the appointment themselves. When scheduling the appointment, students should confirm what they need to bring to the appointment or what they need to send to the office in advance of the meeting. It should be noted specifically what type of documentation the office requires to be considered for accommodations and any date concerns that may make the documentation obsolete (i.e., a



Samantha Feinman, MEd, TSSH

neuropsychological that was written 10 years prior, etc.).

During the intake meeting, the student will be approved for certain accommodations based on the interview with the counselor and their supporting documentation. Students also tend to find out in this meeting how to then access the accommodations. It is important to note that students need to understand that the office will not be reaching out to them to utilize their accommodations, and that it is the students' responsibility to advocate for setting them up at the appropriate times. Because each institution has its own system of accessing accommodations, it is important for students to identify in this meeting exactly how to access the accommodations at their specific school.

What are Some Common Accommodations Approved in College?

Exam Accommodations - Exam accommodations are common for students who can provide documentation that supports a need for an altered testing experience. Accommodations may include extended time, distraction-reduced environment,



Casey Schmalacker, BA

readers or scribes, and computer access. If such accommodations are approved and on record at the school, students will be responsible for accessing them, in that they are responsible for finding out the system for setting up exams (paper, email, online request forms, etc.) and the amount of time needed to fulfill the testing accommodations request.

Classroom Accommodations - Classroom accommodations, which may include copies of notes, notetakers, audio recording, and e-texts, are sometimes offered to students who demonstrate a deficit in attention, auditory processing, or visual processing. Some schools offer notetaking services, where a student in the class takes notes for students with such an approved accommodation.

Assistive technology options allow for audio recording in the classroom. Textbook accommodations are also offered to assist students who struggle with reading. Students should find out in advance what specific systems are offered to assist students (i.e., notetakers, audio recording accommodations, notes in an alternate format, etc.), the specific system for receiving

notes, if audio recording is used in place of a notetaker, and whether the school provides the technology for audio recording or access to e-textbooks.

Advisement Accommodations - Advisement accommodations, such as course substitutions, reduced course load, and priority registration are offered to students with a variety of learning differences, and course substitutions are offered on a case-by-case basis. Often course substitutions are offered to students with language-based learning disabilities to substitute alternative classes in place of foreign language requirements. Reduced course loads are also offered to students who demonstrate difficulty managing a full course load. This accommodation is especially important when a student takes a reduced course load to ensure that he or she is eligible for all the benefits offered to a full-time student.

Samantha Feinman, Director, and Casey Schmalacker, Operations Manager, New Frontiers in Learning (www.nfil.net), can be reached at info@nfil.net or 646-558-0085.

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Inherited from page 15

without autism. Inheritance of maternal CRE-SVs were not associated with ASD in offspring. Although the researchers found spontaneous (i.e., non-inherited) genetic mutations in the coding regions of offspring's DNA, no spontaneous CRE-SV mutations in cases were found.

These findings were successfully replicated in a preregistered follow-up experiment examining the genomes of over 6,000 people. Based on this experiment, the authors estimate that:

- Rare inherited cis-regulatory compo-

nents contribute in 0.77 percent of autism cases;

- Structural variants in coding regions contribute in 1.21 percent of autism cases;
- Additional inherited pathogenic variants contribute in 1.9 percent of autism cases; and,
- Spontaneous mutations to coding regions contribute in 5.1 percent of autism cases.

The paternal origin of CRE-SVs associated with autism contrasts with what

would be expected based on simpler genetic models of autism which suggest that inherited genetic risk factors for autism originate predominantly from mothers.

"The paternal origin effect that we see for CRE-SVs suggests that the inherited genetic contribution from mothers and fathers may be qualitatively different," said Dr. Sebat. The findings also provide a demonstration of the usefulness of SV analysis for identifying and understanding the genetic regulatory elements that influence risk for ASD.

Data reported in the article are archived

at the National Database for Autism Research (DOI:10.15154/1340302).

This article was originally on May 30, 2018 at <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/news/science-news/2018/inherited-variations-in-noncoding-sections-of-dna-associated-with-autism.shtml>.

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IEPs from page 14

refers to modifications that add to the curriculum and alteration refers to altering a curriculum so that it meets the functional needs of a learner (Thoma, Ligon, & Witing, 2004). The use of modifications along with data collection in order to monitor student progress is necessary in ensuring that students with disabilities are making reasonable progress and teachers should be equipped with the resources required in order to implement effective strategies (Shinn, 1989).

Conclusion

IDEA outlines that all children eligible for school aged-services are entitled to FAPE. Based on this federal requirement, as well as the recent Supreme Court ruling regarding academic progress (Andrew F. vs Douglas County School District), a comprehensive pre-IEP process must be established to ensure appropriate, functional, and attainable goals are being set for each student on an annual basis. This includes direct and indirect assessments to determine appropriate annual goals and short term objectives, choosing functional targets that will maximize academic achievement and preparedness for vocational opportunities and an increase in quality of life for the individual, consistent progress monitoring, and data-based program modifications to best meet the needs of the individual.

Sharon Onda, MEd, BCBA, Kylee Formento, MA, BCBA, Erin Way, MS, BCBA, and Vanessa Laurent, PhD, BCBA-D, are Assistant Directors of Educational Services, at The Melmark School, Pennsylvania.

Melmark is a multi-state human service provider with premier private special education schools, professional development, training, and research centers.

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My Life from page 6

diet changes to ease pain and aid digestion. Exercise worked but I didn't enjoy it, so it got stored. The grocery store was a non-negotiable. The horror of that place was replaced with online grocery delivery. Out went the pomp and circumstance of society's "supposed to's" and in came mindful living. Becoming a distant memory were the days of "I have to" as they were far inferior to the new days of "I want to". One by one, I was adjusting and tweaking every component of my life. From sleep habits, to nutrition, to work and play. Each behavior, activity, chore, need, and desire, was mindfully contemplated and adjusted for maximum comfort and success. Goodbye old habits, hello new intentions.

The life I was creating was barely recognizable to the 36 years before autism. I got up every day with purpose. I prioritized my needs. I set goals and crushed them. I made impactful change to my daily living improving my quality of life

with each day. The critical and undeniable fact that I was autistic was not destroying my world but shaping it. It gave hope to dreams thought long lost. It gave strength where weakness was once comfortably residing. It gave insight to memories filled with pain and sadness. It gave power to a voice once silenced by fear. Autism liberated me from the prison I had created to protect the little lonely girl living inside. Autism let that little girl thrive and develop. Autism gave her value. Autism did not come in like a shadow in the night and steal from me. Autism gave in abundance. There was not a moment that could not be improved when looked at through the lens of autism.

That was 5 years ago. Today, my world continues to be colored by autism. I am constantly adjusting the hues and contrast of my life in search of that perfect shade. Mindfully, I fine tune the tones and brightness of my world until I am satisfied with the result. I can actively seek joy now that autism has helped me define it. Happiness is attainable because of my

autism, not despite it. Autism is not a bully. Autism is not an epidemic. Autism is not a burden. Autism is empowering. Autism is choice. Autism is living. Autism is me.

Becca Lory, CAS, BCCS, was diagnosed on the autism spectrum as an adult and has since become an active autism advocate, consultant, speaker, and writer. With a focus on living an active, positive life, her work includes autism consulting, public speaking engagements, writing a monthly blog, *Live Positively Autistic*, and the bi-weekly podcast that she co-hosts, *Spectrumly Speaking*. Becca has published multiple articles about life on the autism spectrum with the goal of spreading acceptance, understanding, and encouraging self-advocacy. She spent four years supporting the autism community in the non-profit sector in her work for grassroots organizations that provide resources and services directly to individuals on the autism spectrum. Becca left non-profit to pursue dual certifications as a Certified

Autism Specialist (CAS) and Cognitive Specialist (BCCS). Currently the Director of Communications at the Center for Neurodiversity, Becca also sits on the Advisory Board of the Nassau-Suffolk chapter of the Autism Society of America, the Board of Directors of Different Brains and the Foundation for Life Guides for Autism, the Community Council of AASET (Autistic Adults and other Stakeholders Engaged Together), as well as, the Scientific and Community Advisory board of SPARK for Autism. An animal lover with a special affinity for cats, Becca spends most of her time with her partner, Antonio Hector, and their Emotional Support Animal (ESA), Sir Walter Underfoot.

For more information and to follow Becca, please visit www.beccalory.com, www.facebook.com/BeccaLoryCAS and www.linkedin.com/in/beccalorycas.

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MHNE Announces New Board Officers and Outgoing Members

By Staff Writer
Autism Spectrum News

Mental Health News Education (MHNE), publisher of *Behavioral Health News* and *Autism Spectrum News*, is pleased to announce the slate of Officers for the 2018-2019 fiscal year. "On behalf of our entire Board, I wish to thank everyone for their continued support and participation," stated Ira Minot, Executive Director, and publisher of *Behavioral Health News*.

Debra Pantin, the new President and CEO of Outreach and past Vice-Chair of MHNE, will be the new Chair of the Board of Directors. Outgoing Board Chair Constance Brown-Bellamy, President of Brown-Bell Consulting stated, "I have served on the MHNE Board since 2008 and as Chair for the past two years, and I will continue as an active Member of the Board. It has been a remarkable experience for me to see MHNE grow in its mission of providing a trusted source of behavioral health and autism education to the community.

Rachel Fernbach, Esq., Deputy Director and Assistant General Counsel for the New York State Psychiatric Association, will succeed Debra Pan-



MHNE Board of Director - Front: Josh Rubin, Rachel Fernbach, Debra Pantin, Constance Brown-Bellamy - Back: David Minot, Jonathan Edwards, Yvette Brissett-André, Alan Trager, Barry Perlman, Peter Beitchman, Ira Minot - Missing: Jorge Petit, Kimberly Williams

tin as Vice-Chair of the MHNE Board. David Minot, Associate Director and publisher of *Autism Spectrum News* stated, "We are so pleased to announce

that Rachel Fernbach will step into the Vice-Chair position. Rachel has been on the MHNE Board since 2016. Her expertise in non-profit governance and opera-

tion will be an asset to the organization during our period of growth and change over the next few years, as will her affiliation with the New York State Psychiatric Association."

The remaining officers, both of whom will be serving their second terms, include: Yvette Brissett-André, Executive Director of Unique People Services, who will continue to serve as Secretary; and Kimberly Williams, MSW, President of Vibrant Emotional Health (previously the MHA of NYC), who will continue to serve as Treasurer of MHNE. Continuing their vital service as members of the Board are Josh Rubin, Jonathan Edwards, Barry Perlman, Peter Beitchman, and Jorge Petit.

We have two 15-year founding Board Members who will be stepping down from the Board: Alan Trager, who recently retired as Executive Director and CEO of Westchester Jewish Community Services (WJCS) and Peg Moran, a well-known leader of the behavioral health community. Ira Minot stated, "It is with sadness and joy that we say goodbye to dear friends who were mentors to us from the beginning, and welcome new leaders to work with us as MHNE continues to be a cornerstone of education to the communities we serve."

Adult Award from page 11

at home. Neal holds a job as an organic gardener, as part of Shemesh Farms' program at the Shalom Institute, in Malibu. He also works at the Farm's grocery store in Santa Monica. Neal inspired the award-winning social skills and performing arts program, *The Miracle Project*, which was founded by his mother, noted acting coach Elaine Hall. Neal is the star of HBO's Emmy-winning film, "*Autism: The Musical*." He has also made inspirational presentations across the United States, using his iPad to speak, at the United Nations on World Autism Day in New York and as a panelist at the FRED Conference, the premier organization advancing housing and employment options for adults with special needs, in Los Angeles.

Says Neal Katz: "Linda Walder and her amazing Foundation have been a part of my life since I was 10 years old. I'm thrilled to receive the Leader in Adult Autism Award and to celebrate this honor with all of the inspiring guests at this year's ASA Conference."

Following the Award presentation, Neal and Elaine will lead a breakout session on Neal's transition to employment and his inspiring growth despite significant challenges. Entitled "From Passions to Employment," the session will track the story of how Neal's passion for nature led to his discovery of joyful and meaningful employment as an organic gardener. Attendees will learn how to listen to a child's needs, especially if they are nonverbal like Neal; how to view "obsessions" as "passions;" and ways to develop

educational goals that reflect the child's true nature and abilities.

About The Daniel Jordan Fiddle Foundation

Founded in 2002 by Linda Walder, a pioneer in the adult autism arena, The Daniel Jordan Fiddle Foundation (DJFF) has established a leadership platform to develop, fund, and advocate for programs and public policy related to all aspects of adult life such as job training, residential living, the arts, recreation, health and wellness, as well as social and life skills. DJFF is named in honor and memory of Linda's son Danny who was diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and passed away at age nine.

Since 2014, DJFF has established endowment funds, known as *The Daniel Jordan Fiddle Foundation Endowment Funds*, that focus solely on adult autism at Yale University, the University of Miami, Rutgers University, and Brown University, in a trailblazing initiative that in perpetuity will assure that the most innovative research, program development, support systems and services will continue to serve the diverse population of autistic adults.

Says Walder: "Our aim is to ensure that for generations to come there will be an impactful focus on adult autism. The Daniel Jordan Fiddle Foundation is committed to providing inspiration and innovative solutions to the challenges faced by millions of Americans living with Autism Spectrum Disorders. The Foundation's Endowment Funds are poised to lead the way on all fronts."

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Thank You &
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College Students from page 8

that creates the foundation of learning success that begins when the students first enrolls in college. This structure must stay in place throughout the college experience, even if the student is doing well. That way, if the physical or personal environment were to change, a support system is already in place.

Disabilities Services

Research suggests that faculty have limited understanding of the ADA and a student's rights to modifications in a university setting, therefore it is critical that students with ASD register with the university's office of student disabilities (VanBergeijk et al., 2008). Once a student has registered, a counseling appointment will be made. The counselor will discuss your academic interests, help your with your trajectory, and most importantly, set the student up with accommodations specific to their needs. Some of the most common accommodations include extended time on exams, note-taking services, and access to assistive technology. From there, students must advocate for themselves by presenting their letter of accommodation to their professors, so they can be assisted with their needs. It will also be up to the student to request for extended time on each exam, so that an alternate testing date, time, and distraction-free location can be arranged.

Accommodations and Additional Support

Just as a support system must be built, the student must employ strategies to supplement their learning experience. Many colleges and private tutors offer seminars as well as individualized instruction to help develop these strategies. Matching students' learning-style preferences with educational interventions compatible with those preferences is also beneficial to their academic achievement (Dunn et al., 2010). For example a student may prefer to listen to a lecture, rather than keep their eyes focused on the screen due to light sensitivity. Another accommodation might be given to record lectures. Any assistive technology provided by the college will come with support on how to use the equipment, and what to do with the information after it is recorded. This same student may prefer to rewrite the material and to verbally review. This may not come naturally, so they will need to practice with a support specialist, who can show them how to adapt to their specific learning needs. Family members can also help by teaching the ASD student how and when to appropriately interact with support staff through scripting and roll play (Anderson et al., 2017).

Organizing Time

On the first day of class, students will

be handed a syllabus. This document can be used to set up a calendar, preferably on a smartphone. Due dates can be plugged in for various assignments and exams, with alarm reminders to keep students on task. In addition, it is wise to input regular weekly study times, to help develop a routine that doesn't interfere with other obligations. A "grade tracker" can also be developed to keep track of grades throughout the term. Using programs like Google Sheets or Microsoft Excel can aid in calculating grade averages.

The syllabus is an important tool to help manage time, but what should a student do when information is missing? Families and mentors can advise students on how to appropriately approach support staff to assist with an email to teachers to discuss and disclose their needs in the class as well as to clarify requirements and due dates.

Conclusion

While testing may reveal where the challenges lie initially, students can find what works best for them through experience and reflection with families and support staff. Through this metacognitive process, strategies can be developed and executed by the student to create an environment conducive to learning.

Ryan Theriault, MA, is the Lead Academic Coordinator at The College Intern-

ship Program (CIP). Cristina da Silva is the Academic Coordinator at CIP Berkeley. CIP is a national transition program for young adults with autism and learning differences. For more information, contact Ryan Therriault at rtherriault@cipbervard.org and Cristina da Silva at cdasilva@cipberkeley.org or visit www.cipworldwide.org.

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Autism Spectrum News 2018-2019 Editorial Calendar

Fall 2018 Issue

“Staying Safe with Autism”

Deadline: September 6, 2018

Winter 2019 Issue

“Autism and the Transition to Adulthood”

Deadline: December 4, 2018

Spring 2019 Issue

“Supporting Older Adults with Autism”

Deadline: March 1, 2019

Summer 2019 Issue:

“Improving Communication Skills”

Deadline: June 6, 2019

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Evidence-Based from page 9

Williams-Diehm, & Shogren, 2011). Self-determination includes concepts of independence, freedom of choice, self-direction, and responsibility. Skills that comprise self-determination competence include choice making, decision making, problem solving, goal setting, risk taking with safety, self-regulation, self-instruction, self-advocacy, self-awareness, and self-knowledge. Students who are self-determined are more likely to become employed and live independently.

The Shrub Oak EI model places heavy emphasis on self-determination, using the evidence-based Self-Determined Learning Model of Instruction (SDLMI), developed by Wehmeyer et al. (2011). By focusing on building self-determination competence while providing employment intervention, teachers can help students acquire skills, behaviors, and attitudes that are necessary for employment success. SDLMI is a self-directed process using a problem-solving strategy in which students learn to identify and set goals, develop action plans to achieve goals, and self-monitor progress toward goals. The SDLMI has been shown to increase attainment of academic and transition goals and enhance self-determination competence.

Research studies have been conducted on the UDT and SDLMI approaches with positive findings. The Shrub Oak curriculum has been designed to expand UDT in combination with SDLMI to create a new

school-wide system to improve employment outcomes. To ensure the program's success, EI uses continuous monitoring of student progress.

In any discussion about employment preparation for students with autism, we need to consider technology as an important support for students at worksites. Technology is incorporated into the Shrub Oak EI system in several ways. Through assistive technology students can be enabled to actively participate in community jobs from the onset of their employment exploration experiences. To promote skill acquisition and development of work-related behaviors, video modeling is used to provide continuous feedback and instructional support. Finally, when students graduate, they should have employment portfolios, which contain vocational assessment information about their strengths, abilities, and individual characteristics, including video snapshots of themselves working at varied worksites.

Strategies discussed in this article have been shown to be effective in enhancing employment outcomes for students with autism. Comments and thoughts from ASN readers about these ideas are invited and should be sent to Dr. Dianne Zager at dzager@shruboak.org. For additional information go to <https://shruboak.org/>.

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**Peer-Mediated from page 12**

scenarios. I learned about the importance of what students are exposed to at home and the importance of how we respond to behaviors. I also learned about the importance of positive relationships at school and the minimal amount of time we get with our students. Relationships are the cornerstone to student engagement, learning, and overall success. Students need positive relationships with adults, but equally as importantly, with peers. Relationships and social skills are a difficult thing for students on the autism spectrum and are something we are constantly working on in our social skills groups. However, we work on these skills in small groups of students who all struggle in this area.

As I saw success with peer-mediated intervention in the special education classroom, I began to do test runs with peer-mediated interventions in the general education setting. With the unique setting of our entire building being open concept and very technologically focused, it can be very daunting for my students

on the autism spectrum to independently be in the general education setting. I started with having them go more often for more desirable activities such as movies, games, science projects, or read-alouds. When I began seeing success in this area, I would push students more to go to math lessons or reading lessons, preferably more interactive ones. This is a place where I am working on continuing to develop as these can be challenging for students. It is difficult to find the balance between peers being able to be productive interventionists without missing out on the lesson.

The goal of this action research was to increase positive peer relationships across settings, increase student engagement in the general education setting, and increase student independence. Throughout this intervention, students have been able to build progressive peer and adult relationships across settings. I have seen a monumental increase in the confidence of my students, to the point where they have been able to lead lessons in the general education math classes, lead groups

in physical education class, and speak out in front of their peers.

After spending six months working out the details of peer-mediated interventions, I can confidently conclude that these techniques were extremely progressive for my students with special needs. Overall, my students were more engaged in both the resource room and general education classroom at this point in the school year compared to the beginning of the school year. Though countless challenges arose throughout this process, I am very pleased with the results that manifested from this action research study. My students were able to appropriately respond to both peers and adults in the general and special education setting the majority of the time. Behavior challenges also lessened as the year went on. I am confident that my students have greatly benefitted from this strategy and plan to continue implementation in the next school year.

Teala Groski, Med, Teaching and Learning, is a Special Education Teacher for the Stewartville Public Schools and an Autism Consultant. For more informa-

tion, email teala.groski@sstigers.org.

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Change from page 10

in many critical areas of life need to be changed as rapidly as possible.

An issue that deserves special attention is bullying, be it physical, verbal, or otherwise. There is a long-standing belief that this is a “natural” part of life that young people must learn to cope with. For those on the autism spectrum, bullying is nothing less than the victimization by one person with greater influence or power of another who is not even able to understand what is happening, let alone why he or she is being treated in this manner. Thankfully, the issue is now being addressed in many schools and jurisdictions. Even then, it is usually treated in the contexts of racism, ethnic prejudice, homophobia, and other defined classes. For the autistic student, who often is not explicitly identified, the issues are even more fundamental and need to be considered as such. Once again, traditional ideas have to drastically change.

Yet another common practice is the discouraging and suppression of intense specialized interests. For a young autistic, this can be very hurtful and even detrimental. Not only are those interests often the most important things in their lives, but they may be the only source of self-esteem for these otherwise-challenged and often marginalized individuals, not to mention their only real hope of eventually finding gainful employment and perhaps an occupation or career. Many prominent autistics, including Temple Grandin, strongly agree with this view. In the context of education, these interests also provide a very powerful motivational tool to get students interested in, or at least pay attention to, other areas or subjects that they would otherwise not care about. A typical example of this is assigning math problems that involve trains for a student obsessed with trains (a common autistic interest). Also, the essential role played by the railroads in settling the Western frontier may help stimulate an interest in American history. There are probably as many examples of this as there are autistic special interests. These perseverations, however unusual, need to be embraced and capitalized upon rather than dismissed.

In the earlier grades, whatever intervention is needed should be provided as soon as challenges are identified. These can involve scholastic, behavioral, social, or other difficulties. In some cases, this will necessitate intensive one-on-one supports, but in many others (perhaps the majority), adequate supports can be provided by the existing infrastructure of school staff and professionals (teachers, psychologists, counselors, etc.); it is only necessary for autistic students to be diagnosed or otherwise identified, and for schools to be aware of the specific difficulties and challenges that they face. The “conventional wisdom” that these students should be able to deal with various situations by themselves strictly on the basis of age, grade level, or scholastic ability needs to be discarded once and for all. Many issues can also be addressed by simple accommodations requiring nothing more than reasonable exceptions to established policies and practices for students who need them. For example, students with sensory sensitivities should be removed from situations where those stimuli are present whenever possible. Also, teachers should avoid assigning classroom tasks to students which are clearly beyond their capability, even when they involve things that someone their age is normally expected to handle.

The majority of autistics, including myself, emphatically identify middle school (it was called junior high school in my time) as the most difficult and painful time in their educational lives. This should not come as a surprise, because those students are just then entering adolescence and puberty – a time when interpersonal and social skills become far more important than they previously had been, and when they begin to gain more independence and thereby need better daily living skills. Clearly, autistic students will be at considerable disadvantage in all of these areas. They are also especially susceptible to many kinds of bullying, not to mention easily deceived or tricked into doing things that are not in their interest. These issues can continue into high school, which also presents increased academic demands. Once again, such difficulties and challenges need to be

addressed, and school personnel need to be properly equipped to do so.

In addition to providing traditional academic supports, schools need to recognize that many autistic students have great strength in areas of special ability, but considerable weakness in others. This is true both of students in special education programs and of those in mainstream classes. One accommodation that might be very helpful to such students is providing remedial instruction in weak subject areas, but placing them in mainstream or even honors classes in subjects for which they have special ability and interest. In some cases, allowing them to take such classes at a local college might also be appropriate. None of this would require anything more than changes in education policies to allow students to do this whenever it might be beneficial.

Also, proper instruction in social skills and daily living skills must be made available to all students on the autism spectrum, regardless of academic or other ability. This should be done as soon as the student is able to absorb these skills, and should be regarded and treated as a form of early intervention; the sooner ASD students can develop these skills (to the extent they are able to do so), the more positive their future outcomes will be when they find themselves needing them. Daily living skills like personal hygiene, clothing and dress, food and diet, household maintenance, and financial management all need to be addressed. Social skills like getting along, being in a group, meeting people, making friends, and finding romantic relationships are equally essential.

Where special abilities and interests are concerned, they need to be encouraged as much as possible whenever the interest is one that can lead to future study or employment. This was the case with me, who had an interest in anything electrical, electronic, or mechanical. It led to my becoming an engineer, because I also had the requisite academic ability. I otherwise would probably have been a repair-person or technician. In any case, my interests resulted in employment and even a career. When the interest is not of academic or commercial significance, every effort should be made to stim-

ulate other (preferably similar or related) interests that capitalize on the same special talents but have greater practical value. For example, a student with exceptional memory for obscure facts or trivia of little practical use can perhaps become interested in areas of history, biology, or other subjects or commercial fields that require extensive knowledge of facts and details; this in turn can lead to more beneficial pursuits. Interests that lead to popular hobbies or activities can also be helpful for socialization, and should be encouraged as such.

For those who wish and are able to attend college, many considerations should be taken into account. These involve the personal satisfaction and preparation for future employment and for life that such education provides to the autistic student. Those not inclined towards academic study are better served by vocational, technical or trade education at the high school or community college level that suits their interests and abilities. For those who are academically inclined, the practical utility of their chosen studies should be carefully evaluated, especially potential for gainful employment after graduation. The notion that a four-year liberal arts degree is for everyone needs to be seriously reconsidered, especially where autistic students are concerned; in my own case, an engineering program was a far more practical and beneficial choice. For older autistics who wish to attend college as mature students, however, such an education may be of greater value in the context of more extensive life experience. Colleges, especially residential campuses, should be regarded as a transitional experience that prepares the autistic student for living independently. In addition to providing adequate supports that help autistic students navigate through academics and campus life, they also need to help them be ready for life after graduation.

In closing, I believe that some of the greatest gains in helping to support students on the autism spectrum can be made by changing traditional and conventional practices, attitudes, and ways of thinking.

Karl may be contacted at kwittig@earthlink.net.

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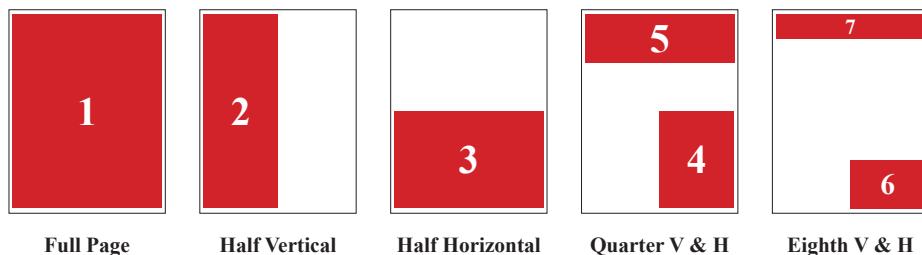
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